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How Parrotheads prep for Buffett show

Our report from the grounds of Riverbend

By **Lori Kurtzman**
 Metromix
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(Left to right:) Jim Massie of Deer Park, Ken Mermuth of Colerain Twp. and Gary Burbrink of Dillonvale show off their Parrothead gear before Thursday's Jimmy Buffett show at Riverbend. (Credit: Joseph Fuqua II | Metromix)



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It is not so startling, this scene, given that Jimmy Buffett's fans notoriously take off their clothes and strap on their grass skirts and drink until they pass out, sometimes before Buffett even takes the stage. Along the periphery of Riverbend Music Center on Thursday evening are men in giant flamingo hats and women in bikinis and makeshift bars and sandboxes and cornhole and Jell-O shots and people randomly screaming "awwoo!"

But imagine this is all new to you. Imagine you find yourself deep among the tailgaters before the concert, staring at a man and a woman and their child in a wagon, trying to make sense of what you are seeing.

Well hello, Mr. and Mrs. Francisco of Huntington, W.Va. Hello, little J.D. What do you think of your father and his coconut bra?

"You like that?" Shawn Francisco asks his 4-year-old, pointing to his chest accessories.

J.D. nods.

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Live from Buffett

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"You wanna wear it?"

Behind a pair of sunglasses, J.D. smiles, shakes his head. No way. He's not one of them.

Not yet.

This is a strange world, this place of booze-loving Parrotheads who talk about a place called Margaritaville and plant smooches on complete strangers. It's a place where George Crume, 39, of Louisville, straddles Kelsey Shoupe, 21, of Fort Thomas, as men pour tequila and then margarita mix into her mouth. Crume puts his hands on Shoupe's cheeks and jiggles her head, and she swallows, and he kisses her on the mouth.

That's nothing unusual.

It's a place where Mandie Frilling, 33, of Union, Ky., paints her beautiful pregnant belly with a parrot and the words "We are the People," a quote from a Buffett song. That's not weird, either – three years ago, Frilling showed up with the words "Parrot Incubator" on her swollen stomach.

"It's Buffett!" said Denny Brown, 48, a grocery store owner from Owensville, which is how he explains his pink skirt and the pink feathers on his ankles and the pink flamingo on his head. "It's the one time of year that's more important than Christmas."

Yes, he really did say that. He laughs. So do the people around him. There are no fighting words at a Buffett concert – only endless offers of drinks and sweaty hugs and the occasional flash of something you might not want to see, like the guy who insists on showing off his fake "codpiece" despite your repeated protests.

Little J.D., sitting in his wagon, is having no trouble with this bizarre scene. People walk around dressed like pirates, wearing hats that smoke and fins made of tinfoil, shouting and hugging and hula-hooping and falling over, and the boy just sits there and eats his hot dog.

Perhaps he's gotten used to it. By now, so would you.

"It's just part of the atmosphere," says his bra-wearing dad. "To come in regular clothes doesn't seem right."



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